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Identical letters dated 5 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to you with regard to the brutal, inhuman chemical weapon attacks perpetrated in Syria on 4 April 2017 in Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib, which claimed the lives of over 100 innocent civilians, including children.

The imagery and information received from Khan Sheikhoun indicate the continual use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, in a flagrant breach of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015). Despite this fact, we are appalled to see that the regime shamelessly dared to send, on the very same day of its attacks, yet another letter containing spurious allegations, which we categorically refute.

The use of toxic chemicals as weapons constitutes a war crime, a crime against humanity and a very serious violation of international law. It is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is a party, and defies the relevant Security Council resolutions. It also represents a grave violation of the ceasefire regime.

As we witnessed very clearly once again, the use of chemical weapons has been one of the horrendous aspects of the six-year-old conflict in Syria. I would like to recall that the deadliest such chemical weapon attack occurred on 21 August 2013, when over 1,300 innocent civilians were killed by the regime in eastern Ghouta, Damascus.

Yesterday's attacks are comparable in their brutality to those in eastern Ghouta four years ago. The agent used in both attacks, sarin, is, unlike chlorine, a highly toxic nerve agent 20 times as deadly as cyanide. It is the most evil of evils.

Let us remember that the international community condemned those attacks in Ghouta in which sarin was used, and that the Security Council, under resolution 2118 (2013), decided that the regime should not use, develop or produce chemical weapons, and endorsed the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council decision on the destruction of the regime's chemical weapons programme. Furthermore, the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism was also established, under resolution 2235 (2015), as the collective response of the international community to the regime's chemical weapons attacks, which continued through August 2015 on opposition-held areas in Syria.

Under both resolutions, the Security Council also decided that it would impose measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in case of violations, one of which is the continued use of chemicals as weapons, an undertaking that was repeated in the consecutive resolutions on the matter.

Two years, five Joint Investigative Mechanism reports and numerous OPCW decisions later, we find ourselves repeating the original discussion on the matter, with the main difference being those killed and wounded, including women and children, and the massive damage done to humanity.

The Syrian regime has thereby acquired a well-established notorious record of committing atrocities involving the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism reports include detailed descriptions of the dastardly fashion in which the regime has used chemical weapons.

The systematic and repeated use of toxic chemicals, the most recent examples of which were demonstrated on 25 and 30 March and 4 April 2017, is a reminder to the international community, first and foremost to the members of the Security Council, that unless the perpetrators of these attacks are held accountable for their crimes, they will continue unabated.

The use of chemical weapons cannot be allowed to continue with impunity, and the regime, which has the blood of the Syrian people on its hands, must be held accountable. Its crimes should not go unpunished.

We call on all the relevant parties, first and foremost the Security Council and those who have influence on the Syrian regime, to fulfil their moral, humanitarian and legal responsibilities in order to ensure an immediate end to such brutal attacks. The attacks constitute grave violations of the ceasefire regime, which is under stress.

From the very beginning, Turkey has been committed to finding a solution to the conflict in Syria that would meet the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Syrian people, which were raised in a peaceful manner six years ago. A genuine political transition and a political transformation that will preserve the political unity and territorial integrity of the country and lead to a democratic constitution and free and fair elections, whereby the people of Syria can express themselves freely within a non-sectarian, pluralist system, must be realized without further delay.

Under the guidance of the United Nations, and in close cooperation with the relevant countries, the international community should demonstrate its determination to this end.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Feridun H. **Sinirlioğlu**
Permanent Representative